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|  **SALAH EL MAHDI** (صالح المهدي)Although he was known as Ziriab, the famous Muslim singer and composer of ‘Al Andalous’, his real name was Mohamed Ibn Abderrahmane Ben Salah Mehdi Chérif. He was born on February 9th, 1925 in [Tunis](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tunis) and died in September 12th, 2014 in Tunis and he was not only a leading Tunisian musicologist of the Arab World but also a conductor, composer, flautist, music critic and judge. |  |

**Youth**

Salah El Mahdi belonged to an educated family whose members were interested in literature, the arts and intellectual pursuits. As a child, he studied at a traditional Tunisian kuttab, (a primary school for Islamic and Arabic education that was common in many Arab countries), then he continued his education at a national school.

He was graduated from [Zaytuna](http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Zaytuna_University&action=edit&redlink=1) [University](http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Zaytuna_University&action=edit&redlink=1) in 1941 and went on to study at the school of law and the National School of Administration. In addition to his academic education, his interest in music began in early childhood. He joined the Rashidiyah School of Music, and he was taught by great artists ; among whom we can mention the Syrian Sheikh Ali Darwish and Khemais Tarnane, masters of music at that time. He was also introduced to Western music thanks to an Italian professor.

He started his carrer as a singer and performer of both Sufi and national songs, then he went on to sing and to compose a wide variety of songs . He soon came to the attention of the school’s administrators, and they appointed him as a music teacher. He became one of the best flautist players in the Arab world and participated in several radio shows and live concerts.

In 1949, he became the director of the Rashidiyah School of Music. He promoted and taught several talents, one of them was the singer Oulaya whom he gave the stage name. After that he was nominated as the president of honor of the same institution. In The same year he became the official member of the SACEM where he will be later on appointed as a member of honor.

He obtained the PhD Certificate in musicology in 1981 and a Doctorate of Arts from the [University of Poitiers](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/University_of_Poitiers).

**Professional career**

He was appointed as a judge in November 11, 1951, at the ‘Driba’ court and then in ‘Tebourba’, at the same time he was assuming the job of music critic in several newspapers and a composer under the name of Ziriab. In theater, he performed several roles with the troupe El Kaoukab of Tunis, then he became its director. In addition to that, he wrote several plays for The radio.

After the independence of Tunisia in 1957, President Habib Bourguiba asked Salah to leave the judiciary departement and lead the arts department at the Ministry of National Education. He founded the National Institute of Music, which trained a generation of musicians who formed a national band that performed on the radio. He also created and organised the musical and artistic programs in schools, high schools and college and he considered music classes as being an essential part of education for children.

In 1961, he was appointed to the Secretariat of State for Culture and information. He helped establishing the National Folk Arts Troupe (1962), the National Society of Preservation of the Quran, the National School of Chanting the Koran and the [Tunisian Symphony Orchestra](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tunisian_Symphony_Orchestra) (1969) which helped to discover brilliant voices such as those of the late Ulyyah and the late Nimah.

In addition to that, not only he participated in the creation of the Tunisian Society for Musical Youth, but also created The Tunisian Junior International Chamber . He organised several festivals either at the national level or at the regional level amongst which ‘Malouf festival in Testour’ and ‘Art’s week’ to promote young talents. He supervised many radio and television shows like "Noujoum El Ghad" or "Initiation à la musique arabe".

He taught and trained many renowned musicians and singers, including Abdul Hameed Belalgiah and Muhammad Sadah. He composed songs for famous Tunisian singers such as the late Saliha and the late Fathia Khairi.

In 1982, he became the general manager of the national cultural activities until his retirement and served as the director of the [Tunisian Conservatory](http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Tunisian_Conservatory&action=edit&redlink=1) for many years. Indeed by 1987 he was mentioned to be the "director of all of the country's musical organizations."

After retirement he pursued teaching and sharing of his knowledge.

**International career**

Internationally, he was one of the founders of the ‘Arab Society for Music’ at the Arab League and managed it for 8 years, to become then a president of honor. He also participated in the creation of the International Institute for Comparative Music Studies and Documentation (IICMSD) in Berlin in 1963.

He was also vice-chairman of the board of the [International Society of Music Education](http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=International_Society_of_Music_Education&action=edit&redlink=1) (ISME), the [International Institute of Music](http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=International_Institute_of_Music&action=edit&redlink=1), and [International Folk Music Council](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/International_Folk_Music_Council). He was one of the founders and presidents of the International Organization of Folk Art (IOV) in Vienna.

He participated in several conferences run by institutions under [UNESCO](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/UNESCO). Later he became a member of the executive committee of the Islamic history, culture and the arts and the High Committee of Islamic civilization which are headquartered in Istanbul (Turkey) and Executive Committee of the International Council music attached to UNESCO.

He was then appointed as an expert for the UNESCO in relation to copyrights and composer rights.

**Heritage**

He has nearly composed 700 compositions, blending classical and folk songs, east and western instrumental music, [noubas](http://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Malouf_tunisien), [muwashshahs](http://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Muwashshah), bachrafs but also chamber music and piano pieces, violins and harps and four symphonies. He participated in 1958 to successfully contest the [Tunisian national anthem](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ala_Khallidi), Ala Khallidi, to which he composed the music. He also composed an anthem to commemorate the Arab League’s second anniversary in 1947. His symphonies were performed during the Moscow and Leningrad festivals.

He was a music critic under the name of Ziriab and wrote articles in several newspapers including Essabah, Essarih, El Amal.

He wrote numerous books on Music that were edited in Tunisia and elsewhere and translated into several languages including Japanease.

Amongst his books :

* Arab music: Growth and development, Al Sharq Al Arabi Publishing House, Damascus, 2003.
* Arab music: a continual process, Al Sharq Al Arabi Publishing House, Damascus, 2003.
* Arab music studies…, Al Gharb Al-Islami Publishing House, Beirut, 1993

He received several distinctions out of which the ‘Music Price’ from the Arab League in Egypt, the Grand Price of Tunis….